



# Correa Mail

Newsletter No. 293 – February 2014

## **\*\* WELCOME TO 2014 \*\***

Happy New Year! I hope you have all had a restful and enjoyable Christmas / New Year period, however you chose to celebrate it. The club grew steadily throughout 2013, with many new members on-board, and fine initiatives taken. 2014 is set to be a big year for APS Geelong, with an exciting range of speakers, a bigger and better plant sale, and lots of club activities in the pipeline. So come along for the ride ☺

### **CHRISTMAS BREAK-UP 2013**

About 25 members made the trip to Liz Wells' property at Meredith for our end of year bash. It was a delightful early summer day, and Liz's amazing rammed earth house and beautiful garden made the perfect venue.



*Members wander in Liz's fabulous garden*

There was much talk – some intense, some inane – many jokes and good-natured ribbing in appalling Irish accents, and even a song written specifically for the occasion. Liz provided a lamb for the spit, and along with the BBQ and food brought along by members, a very enjoyable (and filling) evening was had by all.



*Surely Sue didn't drink all of this?*

Our sincere thanks goes to Liz for making her beautiful house and garden available, not only for the party, but as a campsite for those who didn't wish to make the long trip back to Geelong. And to those who organised the catering - Frank and Tina, Roger and Sheila and Arthur and Linda another big thank you.



*Great conversation on a wonderful night*

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## POTTING-ON DAY

About twenty members attended the potting day at Roger and Sheila's house on January 11<sup>th</sup>. A big trailer with 2 metres of excellent potting mix was parked on the lawn, and a very efficient assembly line was established. Three or four members were kept busy making labels at a table in the carport. These were passed on to those who were separating and putting the cuttings into five inch pots. The pots were assembled around the lawn, fertilised and watered.



**Members getting their hands dirty**

Those members who volunteered to take pots home to care for them did so, and the remainder are still at Roger and Sheilas. It's not too late to take some if you wish to help out with the on-going care of the plants. Just give Roger or Sheila a call to arrange a time for pick-up. Every little bit helps.

We are grateful to Roger and Sheila for once again making their home available for the benefit of the club, to Matt and Roger for loading the potting mix, to Tina for a lovely lunch for the workers, and to all who helped on the day.



**Just a few of the nearly 1000 plants potted**

We potted up the best part of 1000 plants, and we are looking forward to a successful plant sale in April.

## FEBRUARY GET-TOGETHER

Our first meeting of 2014 is the now traditional BBQ get-together, on Saturday 15<sup>th</sup> of February, at Arthur and Linda Pape's place, 40 Lovely Banks Road, Lovely Banks. Festivities get under way around 5.00pm. There will be a BBQ provided for your use, but **NO FOOD OR DRINK** provided. You must bring everything that you wish to eat and drink, and a plate to share would be greatly appreciated. There is a swimming pool if the weather is suitable and you are game.

Hope to see you all there.

### A NEW SOLANUM

**Matt Hughes**

*While trawling the internet for something quite different, I came across this article on several science sites. Reprinted here from the Bucknell University website, is a nice story, by Matt Hughes, about a very interesting new Solanum. Referred to as wild 'eggplant', I know them better as bush tomatoes, bush raisins and kangaroo apples. Normally I would shorten this article for reasons of space, but it is a nice story, and we have room, so I've reprinted it in full. - Ed.*

**LEWISBURG, Pa.** — Professor Chris Martine's mentor and collaborator, David Symon, passed away in 2011, but that would not be the end of their work together. Martine, the David Burpee Chair in Plant Genetics and Research, has identified a new plant species. When he set out on the project, Martine had no idea he was completing work his mentor had begun nearly a decade earlier.



**Professor Chris Martine**

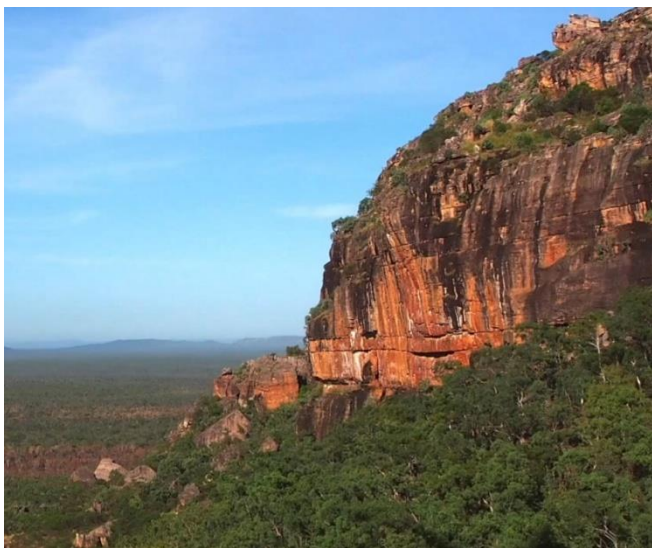
Martine first encountered Symon while studying for his Ph.D. in the early 2000s. Martine's graduate research focused on varieties of eggplants that grow wild in the Australian Outback, and Symon was



Australia's foremost expert on those plants. They began a long-distance correspondence, with Martine sending Symon emails and Symon, then in his 80s, returning handwritten replies by mail. The two met in person in 2004, teaming up on a field expedition to search for new plant species in the Outback.

"David had discovered and named many of the species I was studying, so I was keen to learn whatever I could around the campfire each night," Martine said. "I was thrilled to be apprenticed to the master."

Martine discovered the new eggplant species during a second expedition to Australia in 2009. Botanist Ian Cowie of the Northern Territory Herbarium in Kakadu National Park showed him dried specimens of the plant, which Cowie suspected to be of an unknown variety. After returning to the U.S., Martine was able to confirm through DNA testing that the plants were a previously undiscovered species of eggplant, but he couldn't publish those findings yet. In order to identify a new species of flowering plant, a scientist must describe its entire structure, including flowers, and neither Martine nor Cowie had seen the plant in bloom.



**Litchfield National Park – NT**

Last May, Martine again returned to Australia with fellow Bucknell biology professor Beth Capaldi Evans and student researcher Gemma Dugan '14 with two goals: to find the elusive eggplants in bloom and to study the interaction of similar plants with bees. Evans is an expert in bee behavior.

The researchers revisited a section of Litchfield National Park known as the Lost City, where Martine had spotted the species, without flowers, four years earlier. A wildfire had recently scorched the area, making it easier to pick out green sprouts amidst the gray and brown landscape. Combing through the brush, Martine spied a wild eggplant with budding flowers.

"If I was capable of doing backflips, I would have done them," Martine said. "The only issue was that this was supposed to be our last day in the field and not a single bud had opened. We extended our time in the bush and camped out for two more nights, riding out on the long dirt track to the Lost City each day hoping those buds had opened, but they never did."

As it turned out, they didn't need to. Upon returning to the Northern Territory Herbarium, Martine and his co-investigators discovered that other botanists had collected specimens with flowers on them. He could return to Bucknell to complete his identification of the new plant variety.

Before he left, Martine opened the herbarium's file to gather what information already existed about the plant. What he found there floored him. Accompanying the dried specimens was a page of notes in his mentor's hand, penned shortly after their 2004 expedition together.



**Professor Martine with the budding plants**

"Recognizing that this was likely something novel, David commenced describing it as a new form," Martine said. "He likely stopped short of publishing the new species for the same reason I have until now: under the heading 'female flowers' he wrote, 'Not seen.'"

Martine described the plant as "gender bending," and explained that the females actually pretend to be male by producing pollen.

"What they're really doing is duping bees into visiting their flowers," Martine said. "One of the things we're going to do next is study what that means. Do the bees actually get anything from this fake pollen? And, if they don't, that means the plants are actually tricking the bees into doing their bidding, which would be a really neat thing for a plant to do."



Martine published his findings in [PhytoKeys](#), an online journal providing researchers a fast track for cataloguing new plants. He named the species *Solanum cowiei* to honour the botanist who first recognized it as something new, and credited Symon as a co-discoverer. Evans is listed as the paper's third author.



**Flowers and fruits – *Solanum cowiei***

Martine said he is proud to follow in the ranks of his mentor, and the thousands who preceded him, in the age-old tradition of cataloguing the natural world.

"For a plant geek like me, this is like winning a conference championship," Martine said. "We biodiversity scientists have been at this for centuries, so it's awfully cool to feel like a part of the grand endeavour of describing life on Earth — and to know that there is still more to find."

This is the fifth time Martine has been involved in the identification of a new species — he has previously helped describe other eggplant relatives from Australia and Peru — and he anticipates publishing more soon. Martine's lab is currently working to identify another unknown variety of wild eggplant, and during the May expedition the researchers also found caterpillars eating their eggplants that may turn out to be a new species of moth.

#### **A FAVOURITE TREE**

#### ***Corymbia calophylla***

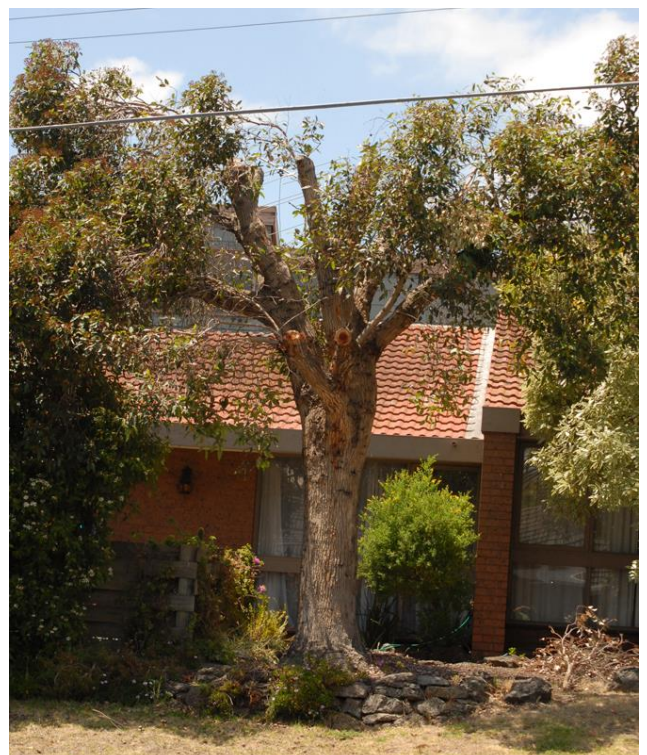
Known as Marri in its native Western Australia, *C. calophylla* is one of the more common trees of the SW corner of that state. It is one of the 'bloodwoods', so called because of the dark red gum it exudes. Indeed, Marri is the Nyungar word for blood.

*C. calophylla* is a large tree, up to 50 metres, but can be smaller with a mallee form on poor soils. It is an important tree as the flowers provide abundant nectar and the big, natural hollows are ideal nesting sites for cockatoos, parrots, owls and possums.



The abundant flowers are large and creamy white, very occasionally pink. The fruits are large and an important source of food for many animals and cockatoos. They are called 'honkey nuts' in Western Australia, perhaps a corruption of hockey nuts, because of their use in a game played by the aboriginal people. It is claimed that they are the inspiration for May Gibbs' stories about Snugglepoot and Cuddlepoot.

There is, or rather was, a magnificent pink-flowered specimen in Francis Street, Belmont, near the Mt. Pleasant Road roundabout. When I went with Penny to take some photos last week, I was horrified to find it had been coppiced to within an inch of its life. Luckily, some of the lower branches were left so the beauty of the flowers can still be seen.





*C. calophylla* is related to the better known *C. ficifolia*, with which it hybridizes readily, and *C. haematoxylon*.

The marri was known by the Nyungar people as the 'medicine tree'. The dried gum was powdered and sprinkled onto wounds to prevent bleeding or was mixed with water as a mouthwash or disinfectant. The tannin in the bark has certain antiseptic qualities. The powdered gum was also used to tan kangaroo and other skins. The blossoms were soaked to make a sweet tea and the seeds and gum were used as a cure for diarrhoea and gastric upsets.

## WE HAVE A NEW WEBSITE

Early in January, Vicnet ceased hosting websites for community groups. As they were our webhosts, we needed to find another provider. I was asked to look into alternatives, and we are now the proud owners of 'apsgeelong.org' and have the next two years of hosting with Crazy Domains.

I thought since all that was new, we needed a new website, too, so that's what we have. It contains all the information from the old site, but has lots of photos of native plants, and maps to show us where the Ballroom and Plant Sale are to be found. We can also download back issues of all the Correa Mails that I have edited, back to August 2010.

I think it gives us a wonderful face to put to the public and shows us in a more professional and much more interesting way. Have a look for yourself

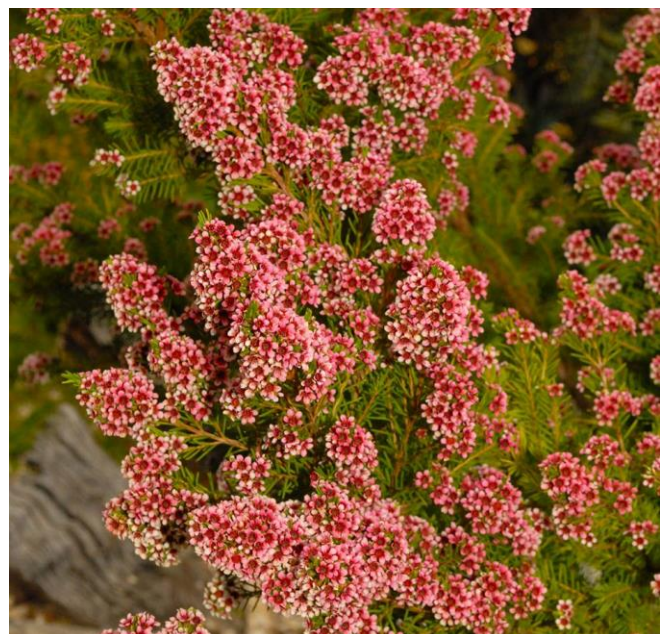
[www.apsgeelong.org/index.html](http://www.apsgeelong.org/index.html)

## OUR FACEBOOK PAGE

I have told you often about our APS Geelong Facebook page, which is starting to get some attention from the general public. In fact, we have our very first member as a direct result, with another coming to join us at our first meeting.

I know that many of you are not part of the Facebook crowd, but I am asking for your help to keep our page interesting.

Please email me with photos of interesting plants from your garden, or the bush, so that I can include them on the Facebook page. Even if *you* don't look at it, others certainly will. These are the sorts of pictures I want. I'll even come and photograph your flowering plants if you'd allow me to.



*Chamelaucium 'Sweet Rosy' – from Ade's Garden*

Please help ... it's a great way to fulfil our club charter by promoting Australian Plants.

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## CONTRIBUTIONS .... Please!

If you've read an interesting article in a newspaper or magazine; seen a good story on TV or heard an interview on the radio; if you have a story to tell about a plant in your garden, or in the bush ... let me know and I'll include it in a future edition of the Correa Mail.

And now ..... back to the cricket ☺



*A screenshot of our new home page.*

And, on the subject of things in cyberspace ....